

History of the Received Text

The Canon of Scripture
Study Paks 4A and 4B

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How do we know what books belong in the Bible?

"Athanasius tells us that the books of the Christians are not infinite but finite and comprehended in a certain canon."

~~ Frances Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, p.95.~~

"Let no private psalms nor any uncanonical books be read in the church, but only canonical ones of the New and Old Testament."

~~ Synod of Laodicea, 363 A.D. ~~

I. THE BIG QUESTION

How do we know what books belong in the Bible? That question, seemingly settled hundreds of years ago, is again the subject of great debate!

The Roman Catholic Church and most church history books claim that the Canon of Scripture was established by Roman Catholic Church Councils. Since the authority resides in the established church, the church can add to the original lists! Later church councils

According to Roman Catholicism that makes them authoritative Scripture.

Ecumenical Protestants advocate adding the Apocrypha to our English Bibles to encourage reconciliation with Roman Catholicism.

Modernists, neo-pagans and feminists are calling for the acceptance of what are often called the "_____". The Gnostic Gospels include a number of books written within the first four centuries of Christianity. The Gnostic Gospels have been made especially popular by the novels of Dan Brown. Proponents of the Gnostic Gospels claim that they should have been accepted into the New Testament!

Others claim that the proper canon of the Bible is unknowable! They say that the Bible is simply a collection of older writings arbitrarily collected for a few religious leaders and imposed on the culture of the middle ages! How do we know what books properly belong in the Bible? Is the faith of believers over the centuries sound and credible?

II. WHAT IS A CANON?

The word canon refers to _____.
_____. The Greek word for canon originally

meant "reed". Reeds were used like rulers or yardsticks are today. The word came to be translated as rule or measure.

In reference to the Scripture, the Canon is _____
_____. Canonization was a recognition that
_____. The term Scripture means
"holy writings". The Canon was a list of books recognized as the holy writings
inspired by God.

III. THE CANON IS DETERMINED BY GOD

It is important to recognize that church councils and leaders could not have imposed a Canon of Scripture upon the people that a strong majority of them did not already accept.

Canonicity was recognized first _____
_____,
then by _____, and finally by _____.

Individual believers might make an occasional mistake in terms of what books to accept or reject, but the majority of believers (the common faith) would not make any such mistake. The work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of individual believers was the primary basis for canonicity. In the Old Testament economy the Scriptures were recognized by the priesthood. In the New Testament economy all believers are priests. The Scriptures are still recognized by the priesthood.

God guided His priests in the gathering of the individual books of Scripture. There are historical references that indicate that this was done under the supervision of the apostles, especially John. Edward Hills describes the process of the work of the Holy Spirit in collecting the New Testament Canon and in preserving the true text of the New Testament.

“As we have seen, the study of the Old Testament indicates that the Old Testament Scriptures were preserved through the divinely appointed Old Testament priesthood. The Holy Spirit guided the priests to gather the separate parts of the Old Testament into one Old Testament Canon and to maintain the purity of the Old Testament text. Have the New Testament Scriptures been preserved in this official manner? In the New Testament Church has there ever been a special, divinely appointed organization of priests with authority to make decisions concerning the New Testament text or the books that should belong to the New Testament Canon? No! Not at all! When Christ died upon the cross, the veil of the Temple was rent in sunder, and the Old Testament priesthood was done away forever. There has never been a special order of priests in the New Testament Church. Every believer is a priest under Christ, the great High Priest (Rev. 1:5-6). Within the New Testament Church there has never been any body of men to whom God has given any special authority to make decisions concerning the New Testament canon or the New Testament text.

Just as the divine glories of the New Testament are brighter far than the glories of the Old Testament, so the manner in which God has preserved the New Testament text is far more wonderful than the manner in which He preserved the Old Testament text. God preserved the Old Testament text by means of something physical and external, namely, the Aaronic priesthood. God has preserved the New Testament text by means of something inward and spiritual, namely, the universal priesthood of believers. Hence the preservation of the New Testament text is not due to the decisions of any ecclesiastical organization or council or committee. All such attempts to deal with the New Testament text are bound to fail. God has preserved the New Testament text in the New Testament way which is free from any traces of Old Testament bondage, namely, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit operating in the hearts of individual believers and gradually leading them, by common consent, to reject false readings and to preserve the true. By this God-guided usage of believers the true New Testament text has been preserved and is now found in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts, in the Textus Receptus, and in the King James Version and other faithful translations of the Textus Receptus.”

~~ *Believing Bible Study*, p. 35.~~

H.S. Miller describes the process this way:

“It is held by the great writers, ancient and modern, and by the great Church creeds and confessions, that above and beyond the common consent of the Church we have the perfect assurance of the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who inspired the writers in producing the New Testament guided the Church step by step in the growth of the Canon, and bears witness with our spirits that the Canon is correct. And what ever may be the private opinion of a few regarding the relative value of certain books, yet a God-given agreement as to the canonicity of our 27 books has been reached, the witness of the Spirit to the hearts of believers through so many centuries cannot be wrong, and no one would care to make a change in the list of canonical books.”

~~ *General Biblical Introduction*, p. 141.~~

IV. THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

There has never been much controversy about the Old Testament Canon except for the attempt by Roman Catholicism to add the Apocrypha.

The Jews recognized that God inspired Prophets with messages that were inspired word for word by God! Often these messages were spoken but at times God inspired the prophets to write down His words. These writings were the "Holy Writings" - Scripture. These writings were committed to the Levites.

The Levites recognized three steps in the formation of the Canon.

1. Divine inspiration
2. Human recognition of divine inspiration
3. Collection of the inspired Scriptures

Even though there were many other books written during the Old Testament era, none of them were ever considered as Scripture by the Levites. The Old Testament Scriptures refer to at least 15 other books (Book of Jasher, History of Iddo the Seer, etc) but there is no record of anyone ever advocating them as Scripture. The influence of divine prophecy was clear.

The Old Testament priesthood was simply trusted to recognize what God had inspired through His prophets!

Jesus recognized and endorsed the entire range of the Old Testament Scripture (Luke 11:51, Matt. 23:36)!

V. THE CLOSING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The Canon of the Old Testament was closed when the Holy Spirit stopped inspiring prophets with new written messages. The people could clearly tell when someone was prophesying (I Samuel 10:10-13, 19:18-24).

The last five men of the Old Testament who God used to prophesy and write Scripture lived during roughly the same period of time: Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. After these men, prophecy ceased until the New Testament era. This is emphasized in the book of _____ (written around 100 B.C.). _____ reports that the people were perplexed because there were no prophets among them. (I Maccabees 4:46, 9:27, 4:41)

Josephus was a Jewish historian, writing _____. He makes the point that no new Jewish Scripture had been given since the time of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.). The reason was that the Jews no longer had any prophets. He also listed the canonical books of the Old Testament! He gave the exact same list to be found today in the King James Bible.

He pointed out that the Hebrews considered these books as sacred, and that no one dared to make any addition, subtraction or alteration to them. (*Against Apion* I 8)

The book of _____ refers to Nehemiah gathering all the sacred Scriptures of the Hebrews together and putting them into one library (II Macc. 2:13). The Jewish Talmud refers to the "great men of the synagogue" and Ezra collecting all of the sacred books and placing them into one volume.

In A.D. 70 a number of Jewish rabbis met in the Council of Jamnia. They specifically rejected the books of the Apocrypha as Scripture and confirmed the same Old Testament books that are found in the King James Bible today.

VI. THE APOCRYPHA

The term apocrypha means _____ or secret or occult. Today the term is most often used of fourteen books or portions of books that are accepted in the official Roman Catholic Canon of the Old Testament but that have been rejected by Baptists and (until recently) by Protestants.

These books were written between the close of the Old Testament Canon and the beginning of the New Testament era. The _____ and never listed them as a part of the Old Testament. _____

_____. The Jewish historian Josephus specifically rejects them as Scripture and the Jewish philosopher Philo ignores them.

Jerome expressly rejected them as Scripture and only included them in his Latin Vulgate under pressure from the Papacy.

The most important reason for rejecting these books as Scripture is that they did not appeal to the hearts of born again Bible believers. The contradictions, errors, and heresies of the Apocrypha were clearly distinct from the heart-warming blessings of reading the Holy Writings. It was clear to the priesthood of believers that these books did not have the mark of the Holy Spirit upon them. They were written during a time when there were no prophets of God. They have only been accepted as Scripture among groups that did not teach personal salvation (like the Roman Catholic Church and current modernists).

King James Bible critics often like to point out that the Apocrypha was included in early editions of the King James Bible. This is true but they were placed in a separate category between the Testaments with a note about the "Canonical and Apochryphal Books". They were clearly identified as "Apochryphal" and not "Canonical".

King James himself wrote, "as to the Apocriphe books, I omit them because I am no Papist (as I said before) and indeed some of them are as like the dietement of the Spirit of God, as an Egg is to an Oyster" (*Basilikon Doron*).

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) stated: "The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the Canon of Scripture and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved or made use of than any other human writings."

Recently, "Protestant" (modernist) English translations of the Bible have reprinted the Apocrypha, scattering the books throughout the Old Testament. The stated reason for this is that it will make it easier for Protestants and Catholics to reunite. Indeed it will!

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